

# Movie Makers

September, October, 1999

Volume 9 No. 5

The American Motion Picture Society

## AMPS CONVENTION

**D**id you get your movie epic sent to the AMPS and/or the Ten Best judges?

I hope so. That is what the convention in Salt Lake is all about. The Sundance Film Festival, which is sponsored in part by Robert Redford, is held each year in Utah. But when I have attended that festival I have been struck with how BAD many of those films are. I've told many many people over the years that the amateur movies we see at our AMPS/Ten Best of the West conventions are much better than many of those I've seen at Sundance. That's the gospel truth. We have some wonderfully creative people in our groups. I hope the judges have an awful time trying to select the winners. That will mean we will be in for a viewing treat at the convention.

Remember Thursday night is "Anything Goes" night. Even if you didn't get a chance to send your movie in for judging, you can still have it shown. Bring it with you, you have to be there, and it should be no more than 12 to 14 minutes long. We'll have a hoot.

As I mentioned in a previous issue of Movie Makers, we will be making

a movie with those who are at the convention as the stars. There will not be any dialog so it will be very easy to do. . .except. . .ah, the exception. There will be need of 8 or 10 couples who are dancers or if you are like me, pretenders. Nothing fancy. Two left feet is OK. It would be helpful, though, if we knew ahead of time those of you who would like to be in this production and if you are actually dancers. We would be able to give you a little advanced coaching on what will be happening. If not, we'll select audience participants and that will be OK too. You can contact me at E mail, edsmithconst@juno.com, phone 801-773-5450 or 2056 West 6000 South, Roy, Utah 84067.

We are sparing no expense on this production. BIG time stars (you). BIG time production crew (2 or 3). BIG time pay (a Hundred Thousand). And BIG time fun. Oh yes, we will need one good BIG time male singer. That one may be covered, but if you want to try out be sure to let me know soon.

You know, we need time for auditions, agents red tape, contract signing, pay arrangements, hotel suites, lemos, publicity shots etc. (And if you believe that, I have some lake  
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## UNICA '99

**H**ill Old and Young!  
A few words from a very oldie.....

I have just returned, with a party of 11 IAC/UK delegates, from UNICA 99. The festival this year was held in Lappeenranta, Finland. 309 people attended. During the 9 days we saw a large number over 118 productions from 31 countries around the world. Quite a number of these were entered in the 'Jeunesse' class ie. made by people under the age of 25 and several of these were chosen to be amongst the 35 or so that were discussed at the closing Public Jury Meeting.

During this meeting the seven members of the International Jury aired their views and discussed (through instantaneous translations into four languages - we all wore head-



phones) the merits or otherwise of the entries considered worthy of such in-depth treatment.

The list consisted mainly of those films that were in the possible award category but a few were there purely to provoke comment. The jury members had this opportunity of expressing their views and defending their attitudes.  
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# From the Editor

## Movie Makers

Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker.

**Vol. 9 September-October, 1999**  
**No. 5**

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**George W. Cushman**  
**Founder**  
**1909-1996**

Matt Jenkins, Editor

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UNITED KINGDOM, Terry Mendoza, P.O. Box 2009, Rochford, Essex SS4 1BF England

I guess I'm stuck. Or maybe confused is a better word. Its this whole amateur VS commercial or professional thing. Now I recognize that if I have a huge budget and lots of money, my production is always going to "look" better than someone who uses VHS and shoots on a day off from work. But my interest in video or film making isn't centered around large budgets and piles of money. I do keep track of what I spend on a production (at my wife's insistence.) In the last two years I know that the least amount I have spent on a production is \$8 and the most has been \$550. So what's the point?

Terry Mendoza's article, borrowed from his web page, has a nice definition for an amateur. But what is a solid definition for a commercial or professional producer? Take me for instance. My primary job is NOT to produce programs. I teach production. While there was a time my bills were paid by shooting videos, I now create productions because I love making them. Sure I sometimes still want some return for my efforts, maybe a little cash or some recognition but that's not my primary reason for producing programs. Yet, because of my access to such equipment as expensive cameras and non-linear editing systems, does this make me a professional? Is having this access an unfair advantage? Many professionals don't consider what I do as professional work. I am regularly scorned by professionals for shooting in S-VHS.

Look at the "Blair Witch Project." Certainly technically amateurish by commercial or professional standards. Yet its made money. Is this work considered amateur? Would it eliminated from our festival?

I believe the line between amateur and professional productions is blurring. This became evident in the early 1990's with the advent of the video toaster. Equipment such as the Casablanca is putting quality production in the hands of the masses.

However, I'm not hung up on equipment. I'm just as happy shooting with my VHS camera and straight cut editing the piece as I am shooting with a Panasonic Super Cam or an Arriflex BL and editing the piece on the AVID.

I've seen plenty of simply made productions that were superb. I have also seen productions that use every effect in the book. To me that shows the inexperience of the program's producer. All the person is saying is "Look what I can do with my toys."

What it really comes down to is story. Is the story worthy of being put into a visual form? How is the story told? Is the story telling effective and entertaining? Am I the target audience for the piece? Who is the target audience for this program?

Whether you are doing a personal video over your trip to the Grand Canyon, shooting a wedding video, or shooting a fictional drama, the process of production is the same.

So maybe I'm not confused after all, just stuck.

Matt Jenkins

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side property out in the Salt Flats that I would like to talk to you about). It really will be a fun event. Contact Roger or me if you need registration forms. I expect to see ALL of you in October at the Movie Fest in the Wild Wild West.

Ernest aka Slick Ernie

# The Ten Minute Rule

No 4 - January 1992

**T**here are three main types of motion picture festivals: business or advertising, invitational, and competitive.

The first is composed of theatrical pictures where the big studios show their latest product to theater owners, hoping to sell the owners on wanting to exhibit the pictures in commercial theaters.

The invitational type is just that, the festival invites certain producers to show a specific picture.

The competitive festival is by far the most common of the three whereby picture makers enter their videos or films, the festival judges view all entries and select those which they consider to be the best made and most worthy.

Our festival is the latter type, as are most non-commercial festivals.

Commercial festivals charge huge entry fees and can pay their judges. Smaller festivals catering to amateurs ask modest entry fees, enough to cover expenses but not enough to pay their judges. As a result it is usually difficult to find qualified judges who have the time and are willing to give many hours to judging a non-commercial festival.

This is the primary reason that the 10 minute rule is being used by festivals, especially those that receive a hundred or more entries.

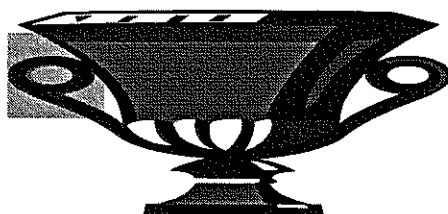
The 10 minute rule is simple. It says if, after viewing an entry for 10 minutes, the judges feel it has absolutely no chance of placing among

the winners, the judges need not look at the rest of it. The primary purpose is to save judges' time by not asking them to sit through long pictures that are far below average.

But all the judges on the panel must agree. If one judge wants to see more, then the picture continues until he has seen enough.

Most non-commercial, or amateur festivals use a similar rule although they may not advertise that they do. It is customary to show the shorter pictures first in order to give the judges a practical idea of the level of the entries entered. Then, when the longer pictures are shown, the judges have an idea of the quality to look for. When the quality drops in any picture, they can then vote to have the picture stopped.

Charles Ross, who was the Chairman of our festival back in the late 50's said every judge should see all of every picture. Theoretically that is true, but it is extremely difficult to get good, objective judges, and if



they are forced to sit through bad pictures, they may never be willing to serve again. It is mostly for this reason that the rule is used.

Many persons have said that a picture may get better as it moves along. An amateur picture never does. If it starts out poorly it ends that way. Secondly, even if it did later improve, should the public at a festival be asked to sit through ten poor minutes in order to see something better later on? No festival says yes to that question. If the first 10 minutes are bad, the picture is eliminated.

Because amateur picture makers

are seldom capable of making pictures over ten minutes that can hold the interest of an audience, many festivals now will limit entries to 20 minutes in length. Our festival accepts any length. If an amateur can make a long picture and make it well, we want to see it and show it to you. If he can't, the 10 minute rule eliminates his chances of having the picture shown.

There is nothing unfair about the rule. If we eliminated it, it would not save a poorly made lengthy picture.  
George Cushman

## UNICA '99 in Finland

**E**very year the UNICA INTERNATIONAL AMATEUR FILM FESTIVAL is held in a different country. This year it took place in Lappeenranta, Finland from July 21<sup>st</sup> to August 7, 1999.

About 30 countries enter films in this annual festival. Interpreters translate information, discussions, and special events in English, French, and German. Most of the films are either spoken in English or have English subtitles.

Not only do the films reflect creative ideas and a variety of camera techniques but also help the audience view a new cultural experience.

Awards are given for the best films selected by a jury. Gold, silver, and bronze medals are presented to the winners at the Awards Ceremony.

Two day excursions are included in the program as well as a beginning banquet and a farewell banquet.

The next UNICA Film Festival will be held in Roermond, Holland from August 16<sup>th</sup> to August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2,000.

Nora Serra

(continued from Page 1)T

here was disagreement, of course, and this was good. Not all people think alike.

Not all viewers can understand the author's intentions - productions can be quite enigmatic and allow various lines of interpretation.

During the week there were also general discussion groups and many of the younger people took part in these and spoke their minds! It is good that 'films' can be discussed in this way and that is why such international meetings involving hundreds of people can prove to be so constructive and helpful to film makers of all ages and of all cultures.

Even as old as I am, I like to think that I am forward looking. I often refer to the past but the past IS important. Experience DOES count. The danger is for one to live in the past and not move along with the current of contemporary thinking. Times change, techniques change, expectations change. Life speeds on at a much faster pace than it did and situations that would have taken tedious explanations are now much more readily acceptable and understandable in a very much shorter space of time - television has been our teacher here.

All this is not just to defend we 'oldies' but to point out that, in my opinion, there is room for all ages of film makers AND a wide age range of film judges.

I must however stress that all jury members should be open-minded and forward-thinking. Viewing experience IS important - the more films we see, professional and non-professional, the better. We need to have a broad spectrum over wide horizons to be able to fully appreciate what another film author is attempting to express on the screen before us.

...back to my editing bench!

GERALD (MEE) Member of AMPS  
Past President IAC - The Film & Video Institute.

## **The Amateur Movie Makers Quandary**

Amateur - the dictionary definition means someone who does something for love. A pity, then, that this wholly noble sentiment, has acquired perjorative overtones as soon as it is used to describes movie making done for love, rather than as a means to pay the bills!

'Amateur movies'...or 'he makes home movies' - they both have connotations of 'naffness'. The sort of expressions delivered with a barely suppressed snigger even.

Although the hilarity may well be founded in the efforts of novices, the true enthusiast does not remain a novice - for proof you need look no further than the enormous body of high quality amateur work available to hire from the Film and Video Institute Library.

Until relatively recently, at least in the UK, professional TV and cinema did their bit to promote this view that amateurs produced 'pretentious wobbly claptrap, masquerading as proper moviemaking'. The reason for the derision was simply vested interests. If somebody, in all probability without formal training was able to produce an entertaining movie, what did that say about the armies of crew needed to produce an equivalent item professionally. The clout of the unions has diminished of late, and professional TV has begun to see the movie enthusiast not as a threat, but as a meal ticket. Here are people, who for the glory of seeing their material on the box, are quite likely to allow their masterpieces to be screened for free - or very nearly.

Not every TV producer is this exploitive, but even those who pay for the use of amateur clips do so at a rate which a professional

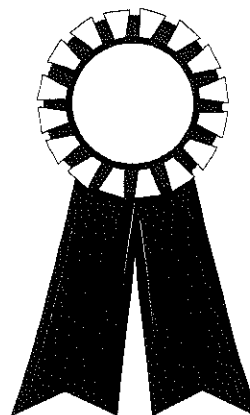
would consider derisory.

But this brings us to a thorny issue - once an amateur is paid for his or her work, do they then become professional? The accepted view seems to be that if the work was made for love, and that the income from it could in no way be considered that person's main source of income, then it is an amateur work, and that person is still a true amateur. With that in mind I am gathering together contacts where enthusiasts work can both reach a wider audience, and maybe get some small remuneration. There is no point in working in a medium of communication and then not attempting to get one's work communicated to as wide an audience as possible. I also see no shame in refusing to let professionals exploit one's blood, sweat and tears for free! After all, if nothing else, a nominal payment will help towards film or tape stock.

Some of these contacts relate to TV use, and others to film and video festivals which have become more generously sponsored lately - although it should not be the key issue, some handsome prizes can be won.

Terry Mendoza

Editor's Note: Visit Terry's web site at [www.terrymen.demon.uk.htm#](http://www.terrymen.demon.uk.htm#)



# **Dare to Be Different or Be Creative in Spite of Yourself**

**A**s one who enjoys watching movies as much as making them, I am inclined to complain about the lack of creativity in most amateur films seen today.

For the greater part, amateur films are technically good. Titles are neatly centered, colors are clear, and pictures steady. The sad part is that many of them could pass for slide shows. Too few filmmakers realize what a mechanical marvel and creative tool they hold in their hand when they point that movie camera

and press the button.

This is sad, because the amateur enjoys advantages the professional producer does not possess. When the amateur makes a film he is BOSS! He is not subject to the restraints the professional producer must bow to. He does not have to compromise his artistic integrity to appease financial backers, temperamental stars and their ilk. He is free to go in any direction his artistic inclination leads him.

But Alas! There seems to be a wholesale reluctance on the part of most filmmakers to try anything different.

The basic tenets of filming are embodied in the following formula:

INTRODUCTION - Long shot to

set the scene.

ISOLATION - medium shot to focus attention to the important scene.

INSPECTION - Close-up to itemize details.

This formula is very valid, but if followed slavishly, tends to become boring as hell.

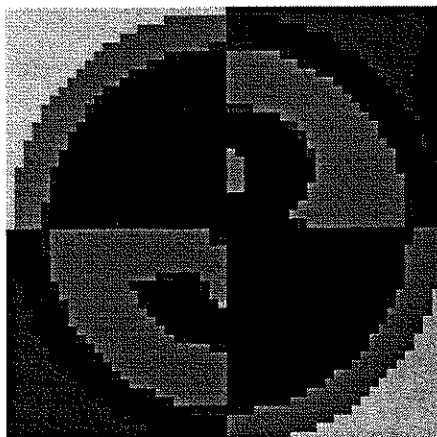
Film makers,...I invite you,...No! I challenge you to be a little daring. On your next film follow this procedure. First, shoot your long shot/medium shot/and close-up routine for the backbone of your story...

That done, now experiment. Pull out all the stops! Try the unusual angle, the different focal length, flash scene, the unusual  
(Continued on Page 6)

Visit AMPS online at:

[www.cameron.edu/  
~mattj/page8.html](http://www.cameron.edu/~mattj/page8.html)

Please consider this to be a sample page. Your comments and suggestions are welcome. Yes it is an odd address but again this is a sample page.



## **APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY**

I Would like to Join the Society:

Dues USA: (includes - Movie Maker)	\$ 7.00
Dues Canada: (includes. - Movie Maker)	\$ 9.00
Dues-Foreign: (includes - Movie Maker)	\$10.00

Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS : \_\_\_\_\_

CITY, STATE, ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: AMPS, 30 Kanan Rd., Oak Park, CA 91377-1105

## **APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY**

I Would like to Join the Society:

Dues USA- incl. - Movie Maker	\$ 7.00
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# Upcoming Festivals

Close Date	Festival Name & Address for forms	Open to:	Subject	Formats	Time Limit	Entry Fee	Award	Show Dates
4-15-2000	Cotswold Int'l Film&Video Festival C.I.F.V.F., 37, Canberra, Stonehouse Gloucestershire, GL10 2PR England e-mail leepres@anglovideogxy.demon.co.uk	ABG	G	HJKMN Pal or NTSC P Pal only	20 MIN	Y	T UV	Stroud, Gloucester- shire, England
N/A Not Announced or Not Available Please include a self addressed stamped envelope with your entry request								
A Non Commercial B College Student C Hi Sch Gr Sch	D Independant E Commercial F Restricted	G Open H S8 J 16mm	K Other L 3/4" M VHS	N SVHS O 8mm P Hi8	Q Invitatat'l R Regional S Exceptions	T Cash U Trophies V Certificate	W Other Award X Approximate Y It Varies	

## From the Secretary

Some of you may not know the meaning of the information after your name on the address label.

This information is to tell you when your

membership expires. Exp 9-1-99 for example, would mean that your membership expires on the first of September 1999.

We try to notify everyone with a little

note when your membership is about to expire, but your assistance in remitting your dues, would be greatly appreciated.

Roger Garretson

(Continued from page 5)

close-up, or anything you can dream up! If the experiments fail, you have your old "stand-by footage" completed. The chances are that you will like some of the new stuff and when it is added judiciously to the old familiar format, you will have a more visually exciting movie.

Another area open to experimentation is the type of film you make. Too many amateurs concentrate on one type of movie, and in too many instances that is the vacation/travel film. Of the various categories, the travelogue is the least demanding in the way of effort required

to make one. It is too easy to shoot a beginning and end titles string all the reels together, add some insipid music and let it go at that. Give any ten-year old a movie camera and a bus ticket and he can make a travelogue... But, if travelogues are your thing, branch out! Shoot a scenario or two, or try an animated film for a change of pace. Your viewing friends will welcome the change and you can learn much from the experimental film that can be applied to improve your specialty.

The amateur never had it so good! The new cameras and films give us the capabilities that until recently were available only

to the studios.

The much-maligned television set can be a school for the film maker. A few hours spent analyzing the techniques of the TV cameramen will give the home movie maker a wealth of ideas for making his own films more exciting to watch.

So,...Film makers! Get out of your RUTS! Let your creativity run wild! What do you have to lose???...Nothing but the license to bore your friends!

Stan Whitsitt